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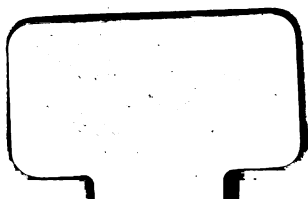
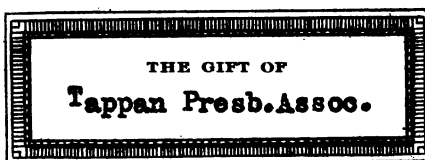
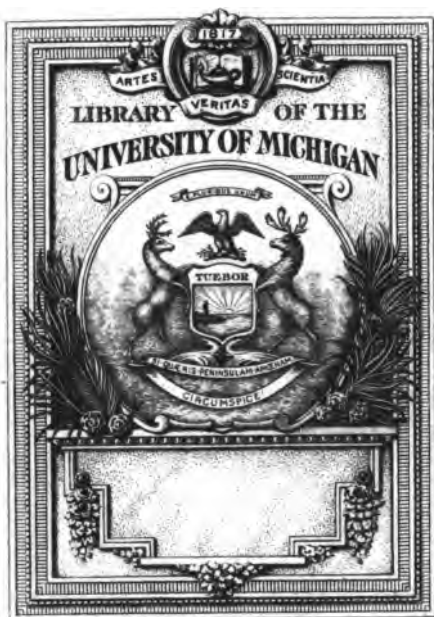
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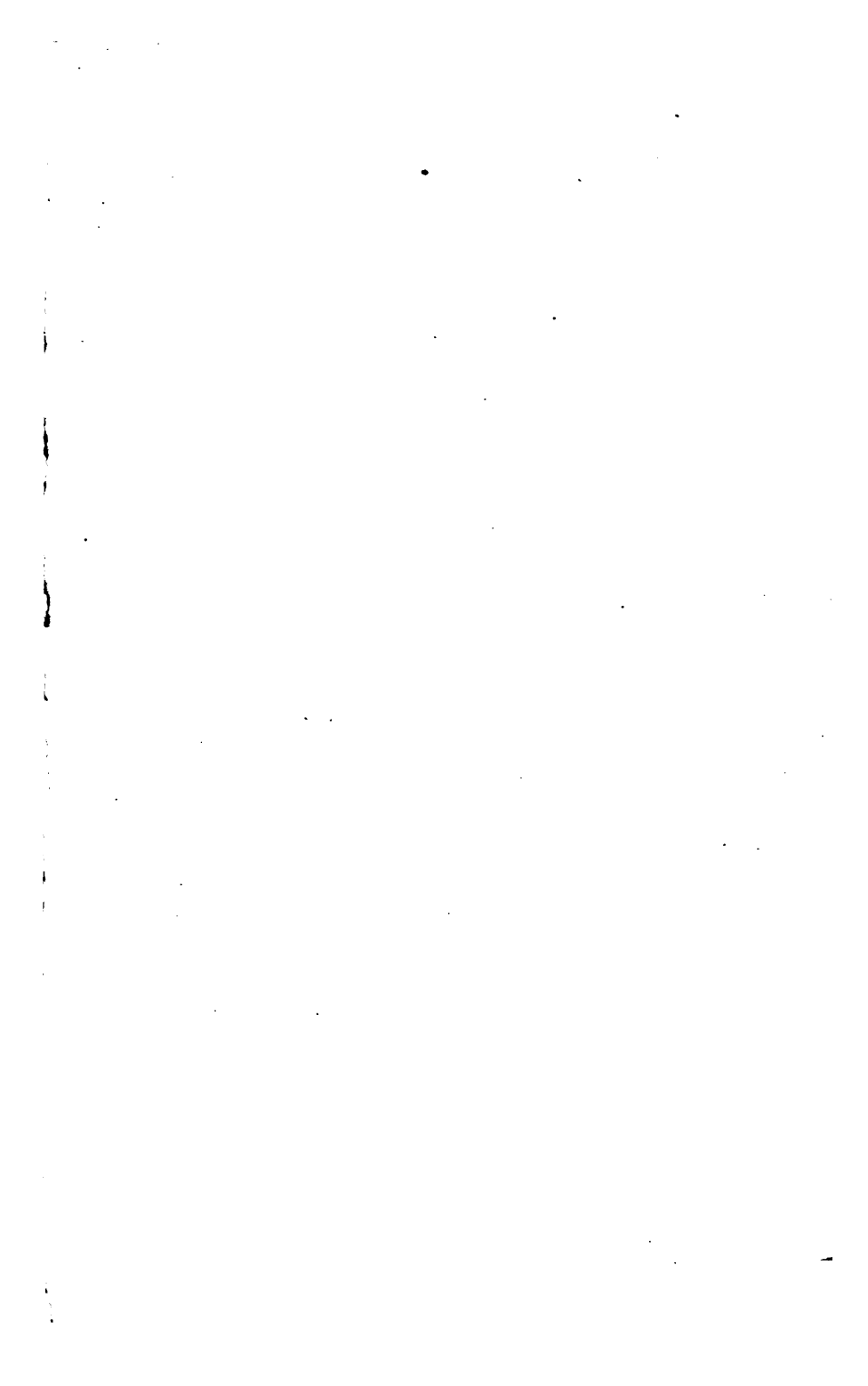
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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH.

2007.  
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A  
**DISCOURSE,**

IN TWO PARTS;

DELIVERED IN PARIS, (N. Y.) APRIL 8, 1813,

ON THE DAY OF A

*Public Fast,*

RECOMMENDED BY THE ONEIDA ASSOCIATION,

TO THE

**CHURCHES AND SOCIETIES**

WITHIN THEIR LIMITS.

—  
**BY ELIPHALET STEELE,**

PASTOR OF A CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF PARIS.

—  
PUBLISHED AT THE REQUEST OF THE CHURCH.

—  
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1813.

*N. B.* Those who heard the following Discourse when it was delivered, and read it as it comes from the press, will find, in the latter part especially, some particulars, which, *then*, were not brought into view. The reason is, the speaker was in a state of ill health, and so distracted with the labor of the day, that he was under the necessity of omitting, in some instances, what he should have delivered, if his health had been good. What was then omitted is now brought in, as was at first designed.

THAT Professors who may read the following pages, may be provoked to love and good works, is the prayer of

*Their Friend,*

THE AUTHOR.

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## The Importance of the Church.

### A DISCOURSE, &c.

#### PART I.

PSAL. CV. 14, 15.

*He suffered no man to do them wrong : yea, he reprov'd kings for their sakes ; saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.*

**T**HE Psalmist, in the foregoing Psalm, is celebrating the majesty, and sovereign dominion of God, manifested in the kingdom of nature: the care he takes of his creatures, and the plentiful provision he makes for them. In this Psalm, the Psalmist praises God for his special favors to his church, and the great and marvellous things he has done for it. In *that* he praises God for his works of common providence in the world: in *this*, for his works of special grace in his church.

The Psalmist looks back to the time of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He mentions the covenant God made with them, and the providences of God concerning them, while waiting for the accomplishment of the promises. Their dangers sometimes were great: they seemed to lie at the mercy of man, and were exposed to be run down and destroyed. At one time, particularly, the rash and wicked conduct of Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons, by murdering the Shechemites, gave just cause of offence to surrounding nations. Strange it is they did not rise, and destroy the whole family. But *they were beloved for the fathers' sakes*. Therefore, though few and feeble; though strangers, and wandering from one nation to another; and from one kingdom to another people, they were guided and guarded by the power, and special providence of God. Here, only, was their safety. So says the text, *He suffered no man to do them wrong: yea, he reprov'd kings for theirs sakes; saying, touch*

*not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.—Mine anointed* ; a phrase which discriminates the true members of the church from hypocrites : in this sense it is used in both testaments. It means those who have received the unction of the Holy Spirit.

The subject before us will be prosecuted by discussing the following propositions.

I. God has had, and ever will have a church in the world.

II. God's love to his church is wonderful.

III. He exercises a special providence over his church, and all its concerns ; and so takes care of it.

IV. The judgments which God sends on the world, and on the church, are for the sake of the church.

I. God has had, and ever will have a church in the world.

From the fall of man, to the flood, little is said of the religious character of pious persons, and but few such are named : Some, however, who were eminent in their day, are particularly mentioned. Of Abel it is said, he *was righteous*. Of Enoch, he *pleased God*. Of Noah God said, *Thee have I found righteous in this generation*. There were, no doubt, many other pious people, whose names are not noted in the *scriptures of truth*. These all belonged to God's spiritual kingdom ; whose names, though not handed down to us, yet being written in the Lamb's book, were members of God's church.

With Abraham, and his seed, God established an everlasting covenant : it comprehended, summarily, every duty, and every privilege ; it is the charter of the church : it rests on this covenant as on its base, sure, and steadfast forever, Here the church has *the sure mercies of David*. Hence we do know that the true spiritual kingdom of Christ, existed under the Old Testament dispensation ; and the church which *now* exists, is the same which *then* existed. It always was, and always will be the same holy and spiritual kingdom. In reference to this kingdom, the words church, and churches, are used more than a hundred times in the Bible.

God not only has had a church, but he always will have a church. In proof of this assertion many divine promises might be recited, the following are sufficient. *Isaiah lii, 15,*



17. *Whosoever shall gather together against thee, shall fall, for thy sake. No weapon that is formed against thee, shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment, thou shalt condemn.*

God has had and always will have a church in this world.

II. The love of God towards his church is wonderful.

This is plainly implied in the strong expressions used in the text. *He suffered no man to do them wrong ; yea, he re-proved kings for their sakes ; saying, touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.*

The great love, wherewith God loves his church, is evident by emphatical expressions he uses concerning it. He says, when speaking of his church, *since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee ; therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.* Again, *I have loved thee.* So again, *I have loved thee with an everlasting love.* Once more, *He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye.* Though God's people had become exceedingly corrupt, and deserved to be abandoned by him for their idolatry and wickedness, yet behold what tender, what affectionate language he uses ; as if he would not endure the idea, of giving them up to irrecoverable ruin. The expressions are very remarkable. *Hos. xi. 8, 9. How shall I give thee up Ephraim ? How shall I deliver thee Israel ? How shall I make thee as Admah ? How shall I set thee as Zeboim ? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim.*

The wonderful love God bears towards his church is evidenced not only by strong language, by lively and animated expressions ; but also by his works. The Psalmist mentions some general works of God, which he wrought in behalf of his people. *Psal. cvi. 43, 46. Many times did he deliver them, but they provoked him with their council, and were brought low for their iniquity. Nevertheless he regarded their affliction, when he heard their cry. And he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies. He made them also to be pitied of all them that*

*carried them captives.* So in the text it is said, *He suffered no man to do them wrong.*

If we look on some particular instances of divine conduct, the wonderful love of God to his church may be seen. He plagued the Egyptians, and brought his people out of Egypt. He preserved them when passing through the sea, but Pharaoh, and his host *sunk as lead in the mighty waters.* He preserved them in their journey through the wilderness, and gave them Canaan, the land he had promised to give them.

From the time the Hebrews were delivered from their bondage in Egypt, to their peaceable settlement in the promised land, which was between forty and fifty years, the sacred history records a series of remarkable providences, and many real miracles, by all which the God of Israel gave evidences of the great love he had for his people.

The history of the church, under the government of the judges, in Israel, and the reign of their kings, is filled with astonishing events in favor of God's people. They were, it is true, in the power of their enemies, sometimes, and those who hated them bare rule over them. But then, God, in his holy providence, would deliver them from the power of their enemies, and set them at liberty from those who hated them.

It was a long and dark night with the church, during the seventy years captivity in Babylon; but the time of its deliverance was fixed by the purpose of God, and when that set time was come, his captives are liberated by Cyrus, and returned *to Zion with songs of joy.* When we see such stupendous works of God in behalf of his people we may well say, *Behold how he loved them.*

But there is one divine work, at which we may all marvel, which is a greater evidence of God's love for his church, than all his other works. All are eclipsed, are as nothing if compared with this. I have referenee to the redemption of the church by the blood of the Lord Jesus. The Apostle says, *christ loved the church, and gave himself for it.* Again it is written, *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.* In the judgment of an inspired writer, this is the greatest manifestation of divine love for the church that ever was made. His words are,

*God commended his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

Thus we see that God not only says he loves his church, but, has, also given practical evidence, that he loves it, by what he has done for it.

Other instances might be specified, in which God manifests his wonderful love of his church : such as sending the Holy Spirit to apply the fruits of Christ's atonement to the elect ;—giving a revelation ;—preserving the church from age to age, and making *exceeding great and precious promises* to it. But these particulars must be passed over by mentioning, only ; because, to dwell on them at large, would occupy too much time.

III. God always exercises a special providence over his church, and all its concerns, and so takes care of it.

The church, in a *cloudy and dark day*, was almost ready to sink under a pressure of affliction, thinking she was forsaken of her God. *Isaiah, 49. 14. But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten. But what saith the answer of God to the desponding church ? Verses 15, 16. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb ? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands ; thy walls are continually before me.*

That the moral Governor of the world always exercises a particular providence over the church, and all its concerns, may be seen in divine promises, and declarations—by attending to some particular events, and by declarations, and acknowledgments made by the church.

In the first place let us look at some divine declarations, and promises. This is one promise, *I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.* This another, *I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go : I will guide thee with mine eye.* That God will take a particular care of his people, in times of the greatest danger, and distress, he gives them assurance in this promise. *Isai. xliii, 2. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; and when through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee : when thou walkest through*

*the fire thou shalt not be burnt ; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.* The enemies of God's people may attempt their destruction, but they cannot effect it ; the church sees its safety in this promise made by the King of the church, the Lord Jesus. *The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* And in this, *No weapon formed against thee shall prosper.*

These are some of the promises God has made to his church, in which he has given assurance of its protection. Let us now attend to some instances of divine conduct, in which may be seen the special providence exercised over the church, and whatever concerns its affairs.

Here we may notice in the first place, what the Psalmist observes respecting Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with whom, and their seed God made a covenant. *Psal. cv. 12—15. When they were few men in number ; yea, very few, and strangers in it—(the land of Canaan ; ) when they went from one nation to another ; from one kingdom to another people : he suffered no man to do them wrong ; yea, he reprov'd kings for their sakes ; saying, touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.* Of Jacob, and his family, at a certain time it is said, *The terror of God was upon the cities, that were found about them, and they did not pursue after them.* When Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons, had barbarously murdered the Shechemites, it is strange the neighboring nations, did not rise and destroy Jacob, and his defenceless family. But they were restrained by some unaccountable fear of Jacob, and his children. The Lord kept them back from pursuing them. Under the divine protection, they journey safely, and none dare touch them, no one dare do them harm.

From this time, until the tribes of the Lord were settled in the land of Canaan, their history fills many pages of the sacred volume, in which are recorded many stupendous works of the Almighty ; surprising turns in divine providence ; remarkable occurrences, and miracle after miracle is wrought in their favor. The God of Israel, for the benefit of his people, is, in all places, times, and circumstances, making displays of his infinite power, wisdom and goodness.

At one time God sent a famine among the nations : and no doubt, Jacob, and his family would have perished, if God

had not sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant. In this instance God made use of the great wickedness of Joseph's brethren to save the church from perishing by famine.

The barbarous policy of Pharaoh, ordering all the male children of the Hebrews to be thrown into the river, would have destroyed the whole race, in a few years; had not God interposed, and by his miraculous power brought them out of Egypt.

When the chosen tribes came to the Red Sea, they were hemmed in on every side; there was no way by which they could escape but upward; and thence their deliverance came. They march through the sea in safety; which the *Egyptians* *essaying to do were drowned*.

If we follow the camp of Israel through the wilderness—follow Joshua in his conquest of Canaan—follow the history of the church recorded in the book of Judges, we see—Oh how many wonderful works of the ALMIGHTY, do we see! And all these wonderful works—for what? One design is to preserve the church. They teach us that God exercises a special providence about his church, and all its concerns.

The history of the ~~Israelites~~ under the reign of their kings, is also, filled with remarkable interpositions of Divine providence in their favor. Two instances, only, will be now brought to your recollection. One is under the reign of Asa, king of Judah. Zerah, the Ethiopian, invaded the country of Judah with an army of a thousand thousand. Asa had an army of, only, two hundred and eighty thousand; yet the Lord delivered this immense army into the hands of Asa; his little army, obtained a complete victory over an army of a thousand thousand, and three hundred Chariots. *The Lord smote the Ethiopians, before Asa, and Judah.* So the historian remarks. ii. Cron. 14.

The other instance, to be noted, is under the reign of Hezekiah. In the fourteenth year of his reign, his kingdom was invaded by Sennacherib king of Assyria. He took *all the fenced cities of Judah*. Hezekiah, full of fear and perplexity, applies to his God, by prayer. The prophet Isaiah, is sent by God, to comfort the king. He tells him, among oth-

For things, that Sennacherib, shall not come before Jerusalem, nor shoot an arrow against it. So it came to pass ; for that night the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred and eighty-five thousands. On this piece of history the sacred historian has this remark. *Thus the Lord preserved Hezekiah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, from the hand of Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others, and guarded them on every side.*

Thus by the agency of God, in disposing events, we see, that he has a particular regard to the church, and all its concerns. What is said of David, particularly, may be said of the church generally. *The Lord preserved David whithersoever he went.*

Let us now hear the declarations, and acknowledgments of the church, in reference to the special providences of God, about, and over all its concerns.

In the following declaration the church acknowledges her preservation to be wholly from the Lord. *If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, now may Israel say : If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us : then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us. Again, My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Again, The Lord is thy keeper. Once more ; The Lord shall preserve thy going out, and thy coming in, from this time forth, and forevermore.*

We have now seen what God has said respecting his particular care of the church—what he has done in taking care of it, and that the church acknowledges her safety to be, entirely, owing to the special providence of God, which is conversant about all its concerns.

If it be so, it may then be asked, how shall we account for the calamities which the church has suffered, and probably, has yet to suffer ? An answer to such a question, will, naturally fall under the next proposition ; to which we now pass.

IV. The judgments which God sends on the world, and on the church, are for the sake of the church. *He reproveth kings for their sakes.*

The Apostle tells the church at Corinth, *All things are for your sakes.* To the same church he says, *All things are*

*yous.* In the Apostle Paul's epistle to the church at Rome, he says, *And we know that all things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.* These passages of scripture, teach us distinctly, that the good of his church, is what God always aims at, by every event which takes place under his government. Sin and holiness, mercies and judgments, all will work together for the good of God's spiritual kingdom. The truth of this assertion we cannot question, with the passages of scripture before us, just mentioned.

We have heard what God says ; now let us see what he has done, by which we may have evidence, that the Lord, by the judgments and calamities he sends on the world, and the church, are all for the church's good : are for its sake.

Let us go down into Egypt, and see what is doing there. Here we see the people of God persecuted, oppressed in a most barbarous manner. The Egyptians *made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field ; all the service wherein they made them serve, was with rigour.* What is worse than all this, murder is added to hard bondage ; for Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, *Every son that is born, ye shall throw into the river.* What a time of distress, and mourning among the Hebrews !

Now we see the God of the Hebrews, lifting up his Almighty hand over Egypt, to plague and distress the Egyptians. For plagues unparalleled in their kind, were successively sent. The last plague was the most dreadful. The Egyptians had killed the children of the Hebrews ; now God kills all the first born of the Egyptians, both of men and beasts. What a distressing calamity ! Now, it is asked, for what were all these dreadful judgments sent on Pharaoh ? They were sent for the sake of God's people : that Pharaoh might be brought to terms, and let Israel go. They were tokens of God's anger against Pharaoh and the Egyptians, but sweet and precious mercies, as they had an aspect on the affairs of God's people. So sings the sweet Psalmist of Israel. *Psal. cxxxvi. 10. To him that smote Egypt in their first born : for his mercy endureth forever.*

What a vast sum of misery was suffered by the devoted nations, when the victorious arms of the Israelites conquered their country. Joshua was warranted by a Divine order, to destroy all who opposed them; men, women and children. For what were these nations extirpated? For what was all this destruction of human lives? It was all done that the Lord's people might have a *city of habitation*. The events, as they respected those nations, were dreadful; by them God displayed his justice; their wickedness deserved all these calamities. But in regard to God's church, it was kindness, and mercy. Thus these events are viewed and celebrated by the Psalmist. *Psal. cxxxvi. 17—22. To him which smote great kings:—and slew famous kings:—Sihon, king of the Amorites:—and Og, king of Bashan:—and gave their land for an heritage: Even an heritage unto Israel: Adding at every sentence, For his mercy endureth forever.* God will devote to destruction millions and millions of the world, for the safety of his church.

In the books of the Judges, and the Kings we have melancholy accounts of great apostacies of the church. The body of the Jewish nation was so corrupt, that, instead of worshipping the God of their fathers, they worshipped Baal, and other gods of heathen nations. Now Israel look to thyself; calamity is near, even at the door. This was uniformly the case. They were subjugated by their enemies: or some other heavy calamity was sent, and in some instances, heaven frowned on the nation a long time. Thus corrected, they would return to God in duty, and then he would return to them in mercy: He would crush their enemies, break, and dash them one against another like a potter's vessel; and deliver them from the calamities under which they had groaned. By their repentance, and return to their God, and his holy worship, the design, and end of God in chastising them was answered, and he would effect in his holy providence, some remarkable event, and they would escape *as a bird from the snare of the fowler*.

Nebuchadnezzar invades Judea, destroys Jerusalem, burns the temple, depopulates the country, by carrying the inhabitants to Babylon. Seventy years the land lay desolate; the city and temple lay in ruins; the seed of Abraham, the friend of God, were captives in a strange land. This was a long,



and distressing, and dark night of affliction to the church. Now what shall we say of all this? Say! we must say of all this, as of all other dispensations of God's holy government, towards his people, he meant it *for their good*. By the prophet Jeremiah, God tells them, expressly, that he had sent them out of their own land, *into the land of the Chaldeans, for their good*. Jer. xxiv. 5.

A vast sum of human misery was suffered at Babylon when it was taken, and plundered by the Medes and Persians. An immense number of human lives were sacrificed to Divine justice. Was this for the sake of the church? Yes: All this misery was suffered by the Babylonians, that God's church might be released from captivity. Of Cyrus, who led the victorious army into Babylon, God says, "I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct his way; he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives."

In Ezekiel xxi. 27. it is written, *I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him*. The enemies of God, and his church shall be remarkably destroyed, again, and again, and again; and their power broken. One nation will be dashed to pieces by another: there will be an astonishing degree of misery, and distress, and perplexity, among the nations. So it came to pass. The Babylonian empire was overturned by the Medes and Persians, the Median empire was overturned by the Greeks, and the Grecian empire was overturned by the Roman. All these overturnings were designed to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah. To Him, of right belonged the kingdom, and God will give it Him.

By Titus, the Roman general, the Jewish nation was destroyed. After this the Jews were so dispersed, that it was impossible for them to observe their long established modes of worship; the Levitical priesthood, was of necessity laid aside, and came to an end. If it be asked why was this done? The answer is, it was for the sake of the church. That the gracious purposes of God respecting his spiritual kingdom, on earth, might take place. That dispensation stood in the way of a universal spread of the church among all nations. Therefore the whole Jewish economy was taken down, that

so the way might be opened for continuing and setting up the church among the Gentiles. In this way God promoted the interest of his holy kingdom.

As a prelude to the prosperity and triumphs of God's church, in the time of the millennium, when *the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ*; the destruction of the enemies of the church will be immensely great. Oh how much human blood will be shed! This is represented to the apostle John. Rev. xix. 17, to the end of the chapter. *I saw, says John, an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, come, and gather yourselves together to the supper of the great God: that ye may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.* The representation is continued in the following verses. All this work of destruction, among the ungodly, is preparatory to the glory of the church in the latter day. It is therefore meant for the church's good.

After all this, and near the close of time, satan, with his adherents in this world, will make one more violent effort to destroy the church. *The number of whom is as the sand of the sea.* But their purposes will be broken; and meet with complete disappointment, and destruction. The following is the scripture representation. Rev. xx. 9. *And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.*

Now the great catastrophe closes, as you may see in the following verses. The dead are raised, the books are opened, the judgment day commences. The church is safe, and its enemies destroyed.

We have in the foregoing discourse followed the church from the apostacy to the consummation of all things, by collecting a few particulars from the scriptures. By examining the word of God it appears that he has had, and always will have a church—that his love to it is wonderful—that he takes care of it—and that he orders all things for its good.

## PART II.

**IMPROVEMENT.**—1. It is seen from a reveiw of our subject, that the world, when it comes in competition with the church of God, is of small account with him.

The church and the world are two different kingdoms: the object of their pursuits, and the tempers which govern the subjects of these two kingdoms, are diametrically opposed to each other. God loves his church, and in his holy government, disposes all events for the highest and best good of his moral kingdom. The spirit of the world is *enmity with God*. He is carrying on a war againts his enemies, and will, finally, bring the wheel over—crush and destroy them without remedy. While the church, not only hereafter, but here, shall see her desire on her enemies; *they are as stubble before the wind: and chaff that the storm carrieth away*.

God valued one righteous Noah more than a whole world of ungodly men. They are swept away with the flood, but Noah is preserved in the ark. When the Lord was about to destroy the cities of the plain, he addressed Lot in this remarkable manner; *Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing until thou be come thither* (to Zoar.) As if the hands of Omnipotence were tied, by the presence of this one good man. His life, in God's account, is of more value, than the lives of all the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim. So soon as *righteous Lot* is secured, Sodom is burned. It is to be remembered that Zoar was preserved from destruction, for Lot's sake: so precious are God's saints in his account.

No words can express the miseries endured by the Egyptians, while the Lord sent on them plague after plague, destroying the fruits of the earth, destroying all their first born, and finally drowning Pharaoh, and his host in the sea. While the Egyptians were suffering in an unexampled manner, and the Hebrews secured, by the providence of God, from the dreadful judgments, we see how much more God values an Israelite, than an Egyptian.

That a few captive Jews might be released from captivity, return to their own country, rebuild Jerusalem, and the temple, and set up the worship of God according to his appointment, the Babylonian empire, and the most splendid city in

the world, are doomed to destruction. Of how small account in the sight of an Infinite God, was this mighty empire; the lives of men, women, and children, the great city Babylon, and all its immense riches, so much admired by the world, when put into the balance with a few poor, feeble Jews! Those things, which the world calls great, are treated as trifles, when they come in competition with God's church. They are as a drop of the bucket, as the small dust of the balance, as nothing. But God sets an high value on his church. Thus he saith *Isai. xliii. 3—4. For I am the Lord thy God, the holy one of Israel, thy Saviour; I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia, and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I loved thee: therefore I gave men for thee; and people for thy life. Let come what will of the world, and the kingdoms of the world, God will certainly take care of his church. He says, I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.*

II. By the judgments inflicted upon mankind, by the righteous governor of the world, important ends are answered.

The psalmist says, *The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth; the wicked is marred in the work of his own hands.* By the natural evils which God inflicts on mankind he teaches us,

1. That he is an holy God, and hates sin.

It is said, *He is angry with the wicked every day.* He destroyed the Old World by water, because the wickedness thereof was great on the earth. He overthrew the cities of the plain, because their sin was grievous. He sent plagues on Pharaoh because he would not let Israel go. He destroyed the Israelites in the wilderness by hundreds, and thousands, because of their murmuring and unbelief. In this way the Lord teaches us that he is the Holy One of Israel. The bible is full of such instances.

2. By the judgments God sends, he lets the world know he will avenge the wrongs, and injuries his church has suffered from the hands of its enemies.

God will not suffer his church to be run down, and trampled on by her enemies, and take no notice of the injuries, and wrongs she suffers. When God's people are crushed,

and treated barbarously by their enemies, hear what he says. *For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise saith the Lord: I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him. So again, The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him. So the text saith, He reproveth kings for their sakes.*

By the plagues God sent on Pharaoh, and by drowning him, and his host in the Red sea, he avenged the injuries his people had suffered from them. To the Ammonites God threatened destruction, because *they rejoiced in all their heart, with all their despite against the land of Israel when it was desolate, and against the house of Judah, when they went into captivity.* The reason God threatened total destruction to Babylon, was the cruelty exercised over his people by the Baylonians, and holding them so long in captivity. By completely destroying spiritual Babylon, God will avenge the persecutions, and other injuries his church has suffered, at her hands. Her time to fall will come: her fall will be matter of joy. *Rejoice over her thou heaven, and ye holy Apostles, and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.*

3. The natural evils inflicted on the world, and on the church have a favorable bearing on her best interests.

It has been observed that all events which take place, are for the good of the church. Now the bible is a church history. Those nations, therefore, who were friends or enemies, helpful or hurtful to the people of God, are frequently mentioned, while other, great and mighty nations are passed by in silence. *The Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.*

By natural evils, inflicted on mankind, God instructs his church. Solomon says, *The rod, and reproof give wisdom.*

When the Israelites saw the plagues sent on Pharaoh, they had evidence that the God of the Hebrews was infinitely greater than the gods of the Egyptians. The Hebrews were taught, that their God, was a God in whom they might put implicit confidence—That it is dangerous to have him an enemy—safe and comfortable to have him for a friend.

God, by involving his church in trouble and affliction, designs to chastise them, for their blacksliding, unfruitful-

ness and spiritual deadness. How frequently did God's people forsake the Lord, and serve other gods. Then to chastise them, he let loose their enemies on them, and afflicted them sorely; and some times, a long season. *Whom the Lord loveth he rebuketh, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*

Now all this is done to bring the Lord's people back to himself, from whom they have revolted. Suffering under the terrible frowns of heaven, were means, very frequently of bringing them to repentance, and reformation. Of Israel it was said, *They put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord.* Like to this it is said of them more than once, when under the pressure of heavy afflictions.

A corrupt church is so far from being secured from judgments and distressing calamities, because it is a church, that they fall heaviest and first on such a church. Judgment begins at the house of God. He told his people thus, *You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.*

3. We learn from our subject that Christian professors stand on high, and solemn ground.

God loves his church, takes care of it, and orders all things in his universal government, for the best, and greatest good of his spiritual kingdom. Therefore, those who belong to the visible church, stand on high and solemn ground: your responsibility is immensely great. You are responsible to God, to your fellow men, to yourselves.

The present is a time of great distress, and perplexity among the nations. Nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. What gives the greatest distress to the benevolent heart, is, these calamitous events are taking place principally in Christendom, where the church of Christ is, if any where in the world. Those who are called Christians are imbruing their hands in each others blood. Heathens for the most part, are enjoying, peaceably, the sweets of domestic life. Christians, murdering and being murdered by each other: Heathens shaking hands with each other in friendly intercourse. Mysterious providence!

If it be asked, why O Lord, are all these evils come on the people which is called by thy name? The answer may be given, with strict propriety, in the words of Moses, concerning God's people. Deut. xxxii. 15—18. "But Jeshurun

waxed fat, and kicked : thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness ; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrifice unto devils, not to God ; to gods whom they knew not ; to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not : of the rock that begot thee, thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee." The church is become " the degenerate plant of a strange vine," producing " the grapes of Sodom, and clusters of Gomorrah." Therefore is the Lord pouring out the vials of his wrath on Christendom.

While the Lord is punishing the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquities, and by such awful calamities chastising a corrupt church, he gives consoling advice to his real friends. *Isai. xvi. 20.* " Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee ; hide thyself for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." In the Divine perfections, the true friends of Christ may always find safety, peace, and comfort.

But let me come nigher home, to the bosoms, and business of the American nation. In describing the calamitous day in which we live, we may with propriety, use the emphatical language of the prophet.—" That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasting and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness."

Christian professors are alarmed at the prevalency of Deism, Arianism, Socinianism, Universalism, and other heretical sentiments. Here is danger indeed, if such errors creep into the church : but if professors disavow the damning maxims of infidelity, the church is in no danger from the zealous exertions of hereticks, to promote error. Happy, indeed would it be, if all the enemies of religion should become its friends and advocates ; but this is not necessary in order to save the nation from destruction, if God's people are faithful to him, and his cause. If not he will pour his indignation on the land, to chastise an hypocritical church. *Isai. x. 5. 6.*

The efforts of the enemies of religion, to destroy it, will always, in the issue, promote it, if professors do not approve of their ungodly sentiments, and follow their pernicious

ways. *There lies the danger.* Witness the history of the church in the Bible; and in every age since.

Power to destroy the church is not delegated to devils, or men. For a season the enemies of religion may triumph, but *the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment.* Their success may flatter them. *For they say the Lord hath forsaken the earth; and the Lord seeth not.* He, at present, *winks* at their wickedness; because he has important purposes to answer by it. *The wrath of man shall praise him: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.* But God sees the fall of his enemies to be near, because *He hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness.* When the Judge will lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies. Then the destruction of the enemies of God, of his truth, and of his church will be complete. Of such, the scripture saith, *Whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.* The church is a society of immense importance. It is called *The salt of the earth—the light of the world—a city set on an hill.* Surely then professors ought to walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God. He loves his church tenderly; watches over it carefully; and labors for it constantly. The Lord says, *Lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.* Why then is America groaning under the weight of such complicated evils? We hear the noise of the warrior, see garments rolled in blood; and the pestilence rages in the land. The moral cause of all these evils is in the depravity and corruption of the nation: and, alas! christian professors have been *carried away with their dissimulations.* They have become worldly minded, and conformed to the customs, and manners of the world. They have departed from the pure truths of the gospel, and the holy religion of the Lord Jesus: they have imbibed erroneous doctrines, and followed evil examples. This, we have reason to fear, is the case with many. And how much unfruitfulness, and spiritual deadness there is, generally, among professors! Therefore the sword, in the hand of the destroying Angel, is stretched out over America, and woe, woe, woe to the nation, if there be none to make up the gap, and



*stand in the hedge to turn away God's wrath that he destroy not the land. Remember what was said to the degenerate church of the Jews. Jer. ii. 19. "Thine own wickedness shall correct thee; and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see, that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord God of hosts."*

At hearing professors reprov'd so sharply, let not a smile of complacency invigorate the countenance of the ungodly, saying, *within their heart, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst.* No; for *the Judge standeth at the door.* The time is not far distant, when he will treat you according to your real character, and just demerit. The scripture saith, *Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them, of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.* Now, *When this cometh to pass,* (and it will come) this question is, solemnly, put to your consciences, *Can thine heart endure, can thine hands be strong, in the day that the Lord shall deal with thee? He has spoken it, and will do it.*

That infidels, who openly disavow Divine Revelation, and men of notoriously profligate characters, should be raised, by the suffrages of the people to important stations in government, is matter of lamentation among pious people. Is this the case now, more than it was forty, or sixty years ago?—If it be, it is decided evidence that corruption and wickedness is more prevalent now than formerly. And what is most distressing, is, that christian professors should unite with the open enemies of Christianity, to exalt such men to the chair of state. How many are there, who profess to love the Lord Jesus, His truth, and religion, and people, who not only put in their own suffrages, but also use great exertions, to influence others to vote for men of known abandoned characters, and even open infidels. Such professors, in this matter, pay no attention to their Bibles. There it is written, Deut. xvii. 14, 15. "When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all

the nations that are about me: Thou shalt in any wise set him king whom the Lord thy God shall choose, one from among thy BRETHREN shalt thou set king over thee: Thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy BROTHER." If professors had united with the more discerning and sober part of community, in the choice of rulers, it is not probable we should now be involved in war.

God will not set a man of a weak head, or wicked heart; an open infidel, or a proud tyrant, to rule His people, unless such a man be their choice. Proud Saul was a man of the people's choice. God told them afterwards, that He "gave them a king in his anger, and took him away in his wrath."

Professors—you stand on high, and solemn ground; and, therefore, you ought to be exceeding careful that you do not symbolize with the world. By conforming with the world you may be instrumental of bringing ruin on yourselves, and destruction on the nation. Great is your responsibility.

IV. It remains to give some directions.

1. *Be at peace among yourselves.* 1 Thes. v. 13. Such a spirit of division and animosity, rages in America, that the existence of the nation is set at hazard. Even in the councils of the nation, how evident it is, that a malignant party spirit governs their conduct. Is it not evident to the world, that the important business of these States, is conducted with an overbearing hand? There is no yielding, no compromising, in matters of the highest importance. Has not this same malignant party spirit, ascended the pulpit, in some instances?—Are there not those, who, by office are the Ambassadors of the Prince of Peace, who cry, *To arms! to arms!* and call on their people to spread havoc and destruction among their fellow-men? Is this preaching the gospel of peace? Is this imitating Him who is our peace? Certainly not. And has not this very same evil spirit taken possession of the church, in many instances? Are there not cases in which professors, *Whet their tongues like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, at each other, even bitter words?* Now if it be so, is this to *love one another with a pure heart fervently?*

2. *Lye not against the truth.* Jas. iii. 14. Deceit, falsehood and lying are testified against, while the scriptures press the duty of sincerity, uprightness and truth. But is not falsehood, deceit and lying, the order of the day in America?